



## **MAIN STREET INVESTMENT FUND** **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **Timelines and Deadlines**

**Q. When is the application deadline?**

- A. All applications are due (postmarked or delivered to the Department of Housing (DOH)) on May 30, 2014 at 4:00 pm.

**Q. When will the grant awards be announced?**

- A. This will depend on the number of applications that are received. The goal is to announce all grant awards by late Summer of 2014.

**Q. How much time does a municipality have to complete a project funded by this program?**

- A. Each grantee will receive a Notice of Grant Award from DOH that provides a start and end time for each project based on the proposed schedule. Projects that can be completed in a year or less will be given more favorable consideration than a project that will take more than a year to complete.

### **General Application Questions**

**Q. Who will review and decide which applications are accepted or declined?**

- A. DOH staff will decide which applications are accepted or declined.

**Q. How many copies of the grant application and required attachments are required?**

- A. One original and one copy of all materials are required that pertain to the application and the project.
- In the case of a plan or supporting document that is part of a larger document, the applicant can submit a link to the document or a disk with the document on it.
  - Also, if there are a smaller number of pages in the larger document that apply to the application/project then those pages must be submitted in hard copy as well.

**Q. Is there a scoring sheet that will be used to rate applications?**

- A. No scoring sheet is planned at this time, but as stated elsewhere in this FAQ some things will improve an application's competitiveness, i.e. having matching funds applied to the project or applying for a future private property façade initiative rather than one



that has already been completed. Applicant's ability to complete the project as proposed in case there is a reduction in the funding amount.

**Q. What is the “legislative body” that must approve the application and the authorized person for this project?**

A. It is the municipality's body of elected officials, i.e. the town council or board of selectman.

**Q. What is the “governing body” which must have approved the plan?**

A. Please refer to your town charter, which may define the governing body. Examples of the governing body are: an Economic Development Commission, Planning and Zoning Board or other municipal commission, etc.

**Q. What constitutes a plan?**

A. Please refer to the program Fact Sheet, which discusses the elements of a good plan.

**Q. What if the plan exists but has not been approved?**

A. Approved plan is the requirement of the statute. If the town commercial center plan exists but has not been approved by the governing body, it can be approved now prior to submitting the application. The resolution submitted can approve the application and the authorized signer, and the plan as well.

**Q. What if the plan was adopted 20 years ago, would this be eligible?**

A. The applicant will need to prove (provide a resolution) that the plan has been a living document that is still valid and used today. Applicants are encouraged to submit a recent approval (within the last five years) of the plan from the governing body.

**Q. What if a municipality has more than one plan that relates to the town commercial center?**

A. More than one plan can be used in coming up with a single implementation plan. In the narrative the applicant should demonstrate how all the plans integrate and focus on the town commercial center and this plan must be approved by the governing body.

**Q. Who will determine the strength of the town plan?**

A. DOH will determine the strength of the town plan.

**Q. If a municipality receives a grant in the first year of the program, can it apply again in year two?**

A. They may apply; however, first preference will be given to other municipalities that has not received the funds.



**Q. Does a municipality need to comply with prevailing wage guidelines?**

A. Yes, the municipality is required to comply with the prevailing wage guidelines.

**Financial Questions**

**Q. How much money is available in total?**

A. The legislature has authorized the Bond Commission to issue bonds of the State in one or more series and in principal amounts not exceeding in the aggregate ten million dollars. \$5.0 million of this has already been allocated in 2013. DOH is planning to go to the bond commission for the second round of funds in the amount of \$5.0 million in late Summer 2014.

**Q. Are matching funds required?**

A. No matching funds are required, but applications that have matching funds will be looked on more favorably as the matching funds will leverage the MSIF funds.

- Legitimate in-kind expenses, such as the pro-bono work of an architect or the labor of municipal employees, can be included in the budget as matching funds that are not reimbursable.

**Q. Does Davis Bacon apply?**

A. No, that is only for federal funds and this program is state funded.

**Q. When will grant funds be dispersed?**

A. Funds will be dispersed after the agreement between DOH and the applicant is executed by both parties and after the requisition for payment has been submitted by the applicant. An advance may be provided to start the project, after that applicants can request reimbursements as the grant is spent down in increments. The last payment will not be made until the project is complete and the completed final report is submitted.

**Q. Can this grant be used with other public sources of funds?**

A. Yes, this grant can be used with other public sources of funds. In other words, your project can have multiple sources of funds – federal, state and or private.

**Eligible Reimbursable Costs/Projects**

**Q. Can the application be for more than one project or activities at different locations?**

A. It is preferred that an applicant submit one application for one location. However, in some instances, there may be couple of activities at different locations as it relates to **one** coordinated town commercial center plan.



**Q. Is the labor of municipal staff a reimbursable expense?**

- A. No, but the in-kind value of this can be recognized in the overall budget for the project. This should be identified under the “town share” column.

**Q. Are soft costs (consultant, design and engineering fees) eligible?**

- A. No, therefore any design and engineering work must be paid with other funds or be in-kind. An application can be submitted without having incurred any soft costs, but the applicant must be able to demonstrate that the estimates of projects costs are accurate. Also the cost of hiring any consultants related to the application or project is not an eligible cost. Only the costs of materials and labor provided by a contractor are eligible (capital improvements). Municipal staff time or property owner’s own labor is not eligible.

**Q. What is the difference between normal repair and maintenance and improvements that will “contribute to the economic success of the municipality” and therefore be eligible expenses for this grant?**

- A. Per statute, eligible expenditures among other things exclude any renovations that are solely the result of ordinary repair and maintenance. For example, the sidewalk that is broken or damaged would not qualify if it were not part of a commercial center plan that meets the goals of the statute. Another example is, if the building siding is damaged, this constitutes ordinary repair and maintenance and therefore will not be eligible for façade improvements. Basically, there has to be an overall plan encompassing various activities that will lead to economic success of the municipality.

**Q. Are property acquisition and easement costs eligible grant expenses?**

- A. No, but the work done on the property afterwards may be eligible depending on the terms of the lease agreement between the property owner and the municipality and if the work meets all the statutory requirements.

**Q. Is the demolition of a building an eligible cost?**

- A. No, building demolition is not an eligible cost.

**Q. Is public art an eligible cost?**

- A. It depends on how this fits into the overall project description and if it is a permanent installation (non-permanent installations are not eligible). However if other sources of funds are available for activities like public art, DOH encourages applicants to seek those funds for this portion of the project.

**Q. Are parking, wayfinding and public amenities like benches and bus shelters eligible?**



A. Yes, if the application can demonstrate how these meet the criteria listed in the program Fact Sheet and not just ordinary repair and maintenance.

**Q. Can grant funds be used to close the gap in a larger project that is underway or planned?**

A. Yes, in fact it would be considered a plus for the application to have matching funds which leverages the MSIF funds. However, the MSIF funds can only be used for eligible activities under this program and activities that are part of an approved plan.

**Q. Is landscaping an eligible cost?**

A. Yes, but it should not be the majority of the project costs and it depends on how it is integrated with the overall plan.

**Q. Can the project happen in a state right of way?**

A. Yes, but the applicant must submit written proof from the CT Dept. of Transportation (CONNDOT) that the project will be allowed to remain in place on a longer term basis and there are no foreseeable plans for major changes to the right of way that may undo the work performed under this program. Also, the applicant must insure that they have all the necessary approvals from CONNDOT for this work.

**Q. Can one application include requests for both a private property and for improvements to municipal-owned property?**

A. Yes. It is recommended that one application be submitted identifying various projects.

**Q. Are nonprofit property owners eligible for funds?**

A. Yes, non-profit property owners are eligible if the property is “commercial” property.

**Q. Is there a requirement that a façade cannot be completed without the remainder of the building meeting code compliance? For example, what if a multi-story building received a façade grant but only the first floor was code compliant for any occupancy?**

A. It is the responsibility of the municipality to make sure that proper permits are issued for the work to be reimbursed by DOH and that all the inspections are conducted by the local authorized building official. It is also the responsibility of the municipality to make sure that the façade improvements are not undone due to the building code compliance issues later.

**Q. Will projects be subject to a review under CEPA?**

A. Generally not. However, it depends on the proposed project and the determination for CEPA applicability will be made on a case-by-case basis. It is highly recommended that if the building proposed for façade improvement is historic, that the applicant follow up with



the State Historical Preservation Office. It is also recommended that the applicant secure appropriate permits from state and or federal agencies.

### **Private Property Applications**

**Q. Is there a limit on the number of private properties that can be funded?**

A. No, but the maximum grant amount is \$500,000.

- If an applicant wants to submit for more than one private property, then the applicant can attach more pages in a spread sheet form to provide all the requested information for each private property. Please be very specific in providing information about reimbursements. Incomplete or confusing applications may not grade high.

**Q. Can grant funds be used for projects that have been completed prior to this application?**

A. No. Applications for new projects will be considered for reimbursements after the project is completed. Work already completed will not be reimbursed.

**Q. Is the property owner's own labor ("sweat equity") a reimbursable expense?**

A. No, but the labor of a licensed contractor hired to do the physical work is eligible.

**Q. If a business that is renting from a private property owner is doing the improvements to the property, can the business be reimbursed for its expense?**

A. No, only the private property owner can be reimbursed for costs he/she incurred provided that the improvements are long term and that there is an agreement between the property owner and the municipality and meet the program requirements.

**Q. Is there a time limit that a private property owner must continue to own the property after they have received any reimbursement for improvements to their property?**

A. There is no mandate as to the time limit that a private property owner must continue to own the property. However, it is expected that the improvements made to the building that are reimbursed by the state must be long-term improvements. The municipality is required to have an agreement to make sure that the improvements funded under this program are not undone in a short time.

**Q. Must the private property be identified in the application?**

A. Yes, not only does the property(ies) need to be identified, the application must include a statement from the private property owner that they are committed to doing the project and have all the funds in place if the grant is approved.



**Q. What is DOH's definition of a façade, i.e does it include a new roof?**

- A. Per statute "structural exterior building improvements" are considered eligible expenditures provided it meets the other criteria.

**Q. Is a façade agreement between property owner and the municipality required that assures that funded improvements will not be changed when a new property owner buys the property and/or a new tenant moves in?**

- A. It is expected that some sort of binding agreement is in place to make sure that the state funded improvements will not be modified or undone in the near future.

**Q. Is State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) approval required?**

- A. Yes, if the building is on the state or federal register of historic places, or a contributing building is in a district that is on the state or federal register of historic places, then SHPO approval is required.

**Q. Are other state agencies permits or approval required?**

- A. Yes, it is the applicant's responsibility to get any and all permits and approvals required to undertake the project.